Memories of a Man Who Made the World Smaller

By William Gildea

For years, the name Guglielmo Marconi has been slipping from public awareness. As an example, The Washington Post, trusting its files to be complete, carried no story relating to him for 14 years, until last year when he was inducted into a National Inventors Hall of Fame here.

That was the last heard of him again until the other night when the first annual Marconi International Fellowship was presented here. Providing a grant of $25,000 for work "to improve the quality of human life," the award was the idea of Mrs. Gioia Marconi Braga, daughter of the inventor.

"It occurred to me while I was watching the first man to land on the moon on television that in all those hours they had to fill in, never once was the name Marconi mentioned," she said.

"My children go to school, and the name Marconi is never mentioned. 'Mommy,' they say, 'You must exaggerate. Nobody ever heard of Marconi.'"

Once, people did. He often traveled to the United States and was well known here. In 1912, when the Titanic sank, hundreds of survivors were brought to New York and, learning that Marconi was in the city, marched en masse to his hotel, cheered him

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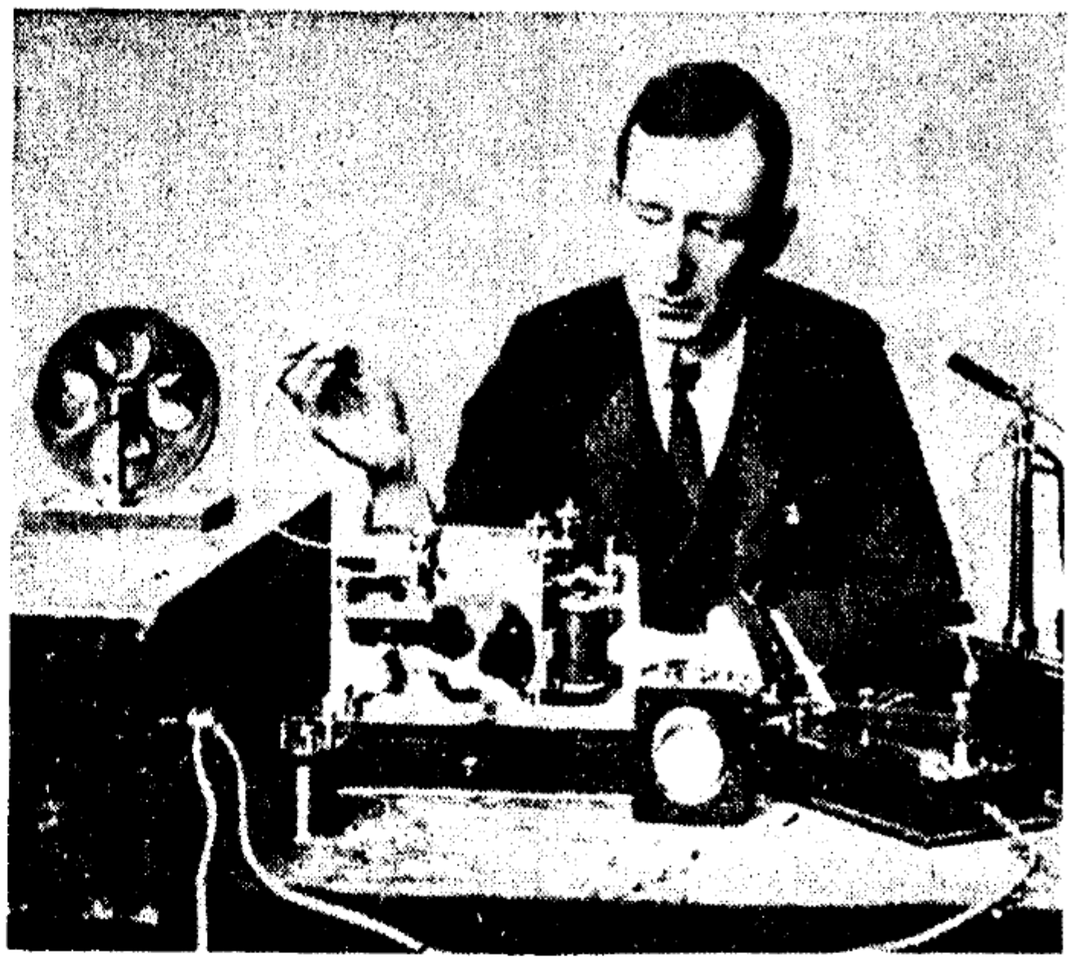

Guglielmo Marconi, in 1903.

PEOPLE

Memories of the Wireless Man

MARCONI, From B1

and cried out, "We owe our lives to you."

All because of the wireless aboard ship. He sen this first message a distance of one mile in 1895. Two years later an 18-mile message from ship to shore opened the era of radio communications. And in 1901 he sent the first trans-Atlantic message.

Mrs. Braga, who was 19 when her father died in 1937, recalled yesterday that Marconi never really sat back and enjoyed commercial radio(though he was the one who made it possible. Rather she depicted him always busy with his work, trying to omprive it. that Marconi never really sat and enjoyed commercial radio, though he was the one who made it possible. Rather, she depicted him always busy with his work, trying to improve it.

"He was most concerned with safety at sea and saw his invention as a way to save lives," Mrs. Braga said. "He was a Navy man himself and loved the sea. That is why he bought a yacht, which became is floating lab. I spent summers with him on the yacht."

She said she remembered distinctly Marconi transmitting from the yacht, in the port of Genoa, an electric impulse that closed a circuit and turned on lights in Sydney, Australia, opening an exposition there in 1930.

In his final years, she said, he worked at developing radar on the yacht. "When he would come in to shore, he would have the shades drawn and the captain would have nothing to go on but the radar signals."

White House photo

Mrs. Gioia Marconi Braga, daughter of the inventor.

Mrs. Braga moved to New York from Italy in 1952 and immediately made an appointment for a job interview with David Sarnoff, president of RCA Corp. It was the company that was the forerunner of RCA that in 1919 had purchased American rights to the wireless from the Marconi Company.

"When the great moment arrived to see Sarnoff, I was very nervous," Mrs. Braga said. "His office was high up in the Rockefeller Center. It was an enormous room. He said, 'Relax, if it weren't for your father none of this would be here. What can I do for you?'"

When she asked for a job, Sarnoff, who as a 21-year-old wireless operator received the first distress signal from the Titanic, replied that her father had once given him a job, for $5.50 a week. She said she hoped Sarnoff would do better for her.

He placed her with NBC, where she "wrote memo after memo" to Sarnoff himself, decrying what she viewed as wasteful television programming and urging increased attention to the arts. After two years, she married George Braga of New Jersey, a former sugar manufacturer in Cuba.

From the first Marconi fellowship will come a history of radio broadcasting. The award was given to former Massachusetts Institute of Technology president James R. Killian Jr. Wednesday night by Mrs. Braga's friend, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. Killian turned the $25,000 grant over to British radio historian Asa Briggs, who will prepare the work.

In the future, Mrs. Braga said, she hoped the award, which is administered by the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in Boulder, Colo., and funded by a number of corporations, will be given to qualified young persons, "perhaps those who cannot afford to make a study . . . to finance that dream or inspiration of someone trying to relate science to the good of the community."